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Teachers' Feedback and Students' Emotional Wellbeing in Writing Courses

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Abstract

This article explores the emotional and academic impacts of feedback in undergraduate ESL/EFL writing classes, particularly in the transition to university-level academic writing. Drawing on recent scholarship and a mixed-methods study involving 63 undergraduate EFL students in Nepal, the study examines students' perceptions of instructor feedback, their emotional reactions, and the role of peer review as a scaffolded support. Findings reveal that vague, overly negative, or generalized instructor feedback often leads to confusion, reduced motivation, and emotional distress. In contrast, specific, personalized feedback and structured peer review are more effective in improving writing skills and supporting students' psychological well-being. The article argues that feedback should be viewed as a sensitive, student-centered process requiring careful attention to learners' mental states, cultural backgrounds, and individual learning needs. Recommendations include adopting process-oriented pedagogies, increasing opportunities for peer review, and offering feedback that is clear, specific, and emotionally considerate.

Keywords*:* feedback literacy, academic writing, ESL students, emotional well-being, peer review, writing instruction, higher education, personalized feedback, process-based learning, teacher-student communication, feedback decoding, EFL writing pedagogy, student perception, mental health in education

Introduction

Feedback has become a necessity now in each sphere of human life. Wherever we go, we are asked to review services and rate them. In academics, feedback plays a massive role. Different people have different opinions about feedback. Some scholars focused on positive feedback, and some focused on negative but constructive feedback. The ultimate goal of giving feedback is to help students achieve their academic goals. Researchers have been studying teachers' feedback on students' assignments for years. Nonetheless, I argue, there is a lack of substantial studies on the effect of negative and complex feedback on students' emotional well-being. Recently, scholarly interests have shifted to emotion-related feedback and writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Yu et al., 2021). Schwab et al. (2022) argued, "Well-being in school as well as different academic trait emotions are linked to teachers' feedback and can affect students' academic achievement" (p. 981). When teachers' feedback and students' expectations diverge significantly, it profoundly affects students' emotions, leading to feelings of pessimism and demoralization. There is a strong need for seeking correlation between teachers' feedback and students' emotional well-being.

Students' transition to tertiary education necessitates feedback because of a strong demand for academic writing style. When students graduate high school and are in the process of transitioning to college/university education, they have fairly ambivalent feelings toward their new higher education journey. At this stage, the greatest challenge they encounter is how they are going to develop university-level academic writing skills (Ding & Bruce, 2018). It is normal for students to feel anxious because they have different educational backgrounds and differing writing skills. Middle school and high school education curricula include five-paragraph essays, stories, descriptions, letters, and factual pieces. In contrast, colleges and universities require students to produce work that is significantly more demanding in both quality and quantity. The difference between a university's writing course curriculum and that of a high school is significantly large. This gap often causes discomfort in students' academic lives. And to deal with students' woes and anguish, teachers/instructors must make extensive use of different feedback types and deliveries in composition classes.

Every type of feedback is important to university students, but it may not work for every student. In writing classes, one of the basic purposes of giving feedback is to encourage students to overcome their fear of writing quality texts. Teachers traditionally transfer feedback, either verbally or in written form, to students as a correction/accuracy tool. Conversely, the latest scholarship has devoted its focus to learner-centric feedback. In other words, learners do not improve their writing unless they perceive feedback as progressive or positive and engage sincerely with it. Young students may misinterpret teachers' feedback or interpret it as a sign of embarrassment. If students do not entertain feedback, it has consequences such as mental distress. Hence, what matters about feedback is how students want to receive feedback without affecting their mental well-being. The preference for feedback varieties and deliveries differs from one student to another owing to factors such as culture, place, gender, age, and learning psychology. Recent scholarship on feedback has indicated that the practice of writing adapts to the specific context, ideologies, and power relations involved (Boyes et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2021). For instance, some teachers tend to remain resistant to departmental or institutional policies on academic writing that contradict their perspectives. This attitude of teachers is bound to have negative impacts on student learning and their confidence.

A large amount of scholarship on feedback has stressed the influential role of feedback during the process of accomplishing something, especially in student learning in both EFL and NS (Native Speakers) contexts (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Ramsden (2003)

asserts that there is a direct correlation between effective feedback on students' assignments and quality writing teaching. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) emphasized the importance of feedback as a supporting tool of learning. There are countless opportunities that instructors and students can grab from feedback exercises in writing classes, like in other sectors. Nonetheless, the most important thing that often remains overlooked is how teachers' feedback misfires, leading to students' poor writing performance. However, it is undeniable that incorporating students' psychology and preferences into teachers' feedback schedules and models can greatly benefit them. Furthermore, instructors commonly provide at least one round of feedback on students' work because of time constraints. Yorke (2003) argues that merely giving feedback may not be helpful if instructors neglect the psychology that is intrinsically associated with feedback when it comes to student learning outcomes in writing classes. The danger is that feedback can be discouraging to a plethora of students. Recent scholarship on feedback has clearly demonstrated that students feel demotivated in the absence of specific or progressive feedback. Corrective feedback, global feedback, and scribbles on students' writings tend to discourage aspiring writers from realizing their full potential as emerging authors. Instructors must ensure that their feedback boosts students' morale, not undermines their confidence to write better.

Writing instructors offer their feedback in various ways; they annotate students' sentences or paragraphs, write notes in the margin, speak to their students about revisions, record their audio feedback and share it with them, or email their general feedback to students. While giving feedback, some instructors focus on content/language and form. While some instructors tailor their feedback specifically, others typically use a universal approach to provide comments on their students' assignments. Fleming (1999) stated that grading students' assignments reflects students' academic standing and their experience. Feedback is not only about what is right and what is wrong. When feedback is given, the quality of assignments is improved, students' writing is enhanced, grades are justified, and an instructor's expertise, efficiency, and authority are reflected. Because of a lack of comprehensive knowledge of feedback, both students and instructors may not fully participate in a feedback process to maximize student learning. An instructor's conscious effort to give feedback on student writing works better than just providing global feedback—shooting without aiming.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. In ESL/EFL undergraduate writing classes, teachers' feedback on students' writing plays a rewarding role. Do teachers always give feedback by considering students' individual needs and emotional well-being?

2. Do students' failures to decode their teachers' feedback on their written assignments impact students' emotional well-being?

3. Does peer review address the issue of feedback in writing classes?

Literature Review

From the standpoint of teaching writing, feedback is simply understood to be a piece of information shared with students about their responses to a particular writing assignment (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Such information enforces a regulation to replace errors found in the assignment, thereby narrowing the gap between the students' current writing response and the expected level of writing proficiency for that specific task (Wiliam, 2023). As feedback is

beneficial to facilitate students' learning (Wisniewski et al., 2020), feedback has proved to be an important and contemporary discourse in both English-speaking spheres and elsewhere for the past 50 years (Han, 2021). It is obvious that in the absence of teachers' feedback, students themselves may not be able to keep track of the progress of their writing standards. Teachers must persuade students of their writing skills and where they should be. Feedback fills this gap.

There is a preconception that although dedicated instructors take pains to provide constructive feedback on their students' writing assignments, in most cases, teachers' feedback is not always welcomed by those students who have been achieving the highest grades and those who have a hard time connecting their weak areas and teachers' feedback. In addition, instructors may not assume that their students can decode their feedback and apply it. Sadler (2010) justifies it: "Regardless of levels of motivation to learn, students cannot convert feedback statements into actions for improvement without sufficient working knowledge of some fundamental concepts" (p. 537). Therefore, it is imperative that writing instructors find out why their students do not take the feedback into serious account or what forms of feedback they are looking forward to receiving to elevate their writing quality.

Recent scholarship on English language teaching advocates for a communicative approach to teaching writing, with less emphasis on strict rules of grammar but with emphasis on fluency through content and meaning. In contrast to earlier behaviorist techniques, writing instructors, nowadays, endeavor to gauge how students express themselves and stick to organizational structures in their compositions. A free writing assignment, for example, can be a positive technique to provide students with a larger framework where they could write with fewer restrictions and more options to select from. Students tend to write better pieces when presented with more choices. It is true and understandable that some students prefer corrective feedback to other existing ones so that they do not have to spend much time generating ideas and verifying grammatical rules. There has been some research on corrective feedback (e.g., Koltovskaia, 2020; Sato & Loewen, 2018) that still finds correcting grammatical errors, stylistic issues, and organizational deficiencies relevant in writing. This approach is going to help only a small portion of students in every writing class. Bigger ideas and expression are expected to be reflected in students' writing.

Although feedback has a prominent role in learning, "many issues relating to feedback remain unresolved. The main reason for this is that feedback on students' writing, whether by teachers, peers, or machines, is a form of social action designed to accomplish educational and social goals" (Higgins et al., 2001; Hyland & Hyland, 2019, p. 13). It is interaction and negotiation between two entities in a fixed setting. This feedback negotiation is likely to face challenges such as time management, miscommunication between a teacher and a student, and emotional barriers. "The type of feedback (success versus failure; self-referential versus normative) students receive can profoundly influence their emotions. Research has yet to be conducted on the differences between behavior feedback and achievement feedback and their link to students' emotional experiences" (Schwab et al., 2022, p. 981). Instructors must bear in mind that their comments may affect students' emotional well-being. The two cultural, social, and affective backgrounds that exist between a student and a teacher heavily influence students' perceptions and understanding of feedback. Such differing backgrounds persist as a hindrance to students' writing caliber. In the following section, this article discusses some effective methods to deliver feedback for effective communication between students and their instructors.

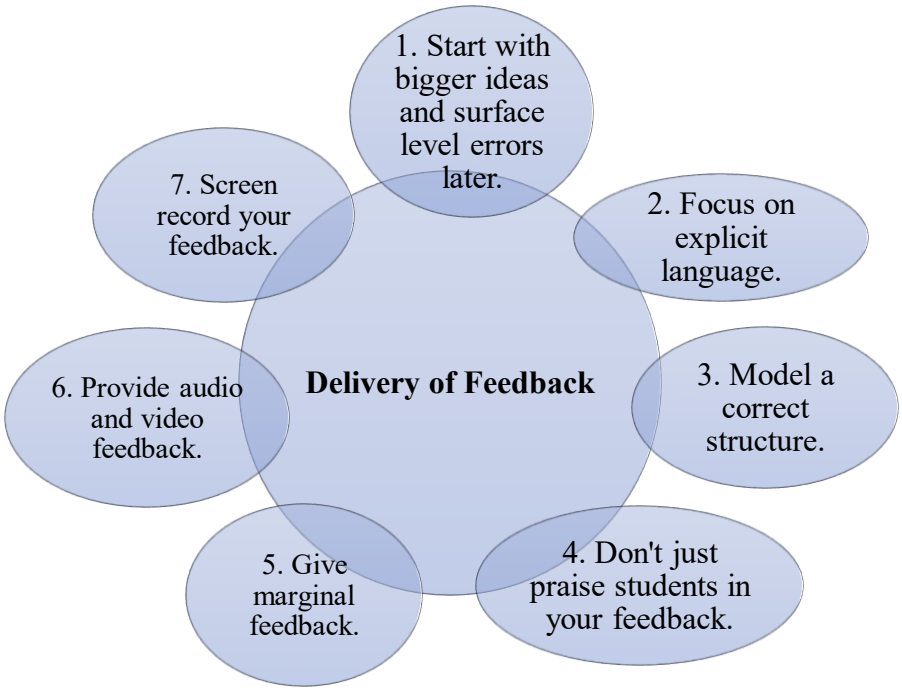
Writing instructors are more likely to provide global feedback on their students' writing when they do not have ample time to grade their students' assignments in larger classes. However, global feedback is not always effective. To tackle this problem, instructors may prepare two banks of comments. The first one is based on common errors that an instructor comes across when reviewing students' work. The other is a list of personalized comments, with greater emphasis on revision. Students themselves will find out if any of the general comments apply to their individual cases. This strategy engaged students in editing and revision processes.

Methods for Delivery

There are many different methods available for delivering feedback effectively; these include, but are not limited to. Each of these options (Fig. 1) is outlined below.

Figure 1

Seven Methods of Delivering Feedback



Even though writing instructors grapple with time constraints, the fact that there are multiple rounds of revisions before submitting a final product is rewarding. Multiple revisions shape students' thoughts and structure their ideas in earlier rounds. Surface-level errors can be fixed in the final stage of writing. Graff and Birkenstein (2024) confess that even though global revisions are preferable to micro-level corrections, the combination of these two approaches works best for students. The responsibility is upon instructors' dedication and time management skills. 2. Instructors may write their feedback in layperson's terms. If we want students to work on their drafts as we desire, we cannot substitute explicit language. For instance, *when an instructor must comment on a paragraph and sentence structure, it is better to focus on the former because structures precede paragraphs and*

longer texts. A good sentence structure leads to good writing products. 3. For sentence-level issues, instructors may apply the technique of using correct structures as models and provide indirect feedback. This method reduces students' reliance on model answers but assists them in generating their own sentences or answers. 4. Instructors are not expected to write complimentary phrases such as *Good job! Terrible idea!* and *Keep it up!* It is imperative that instructors explain to them how their writing has matched the assignment requirement or quality. 5. Marginal comments make students' jobs easier and are noticeable in a Word or PDF document. They are cleaner than scribbles on printed materials. 6. Commentary phrases at times do not echo instructors' real emotions and appreciation. Therefore, instructors may record their audio or video feedback with emotive gestures, which probably hold the powerful drive to motivate students. 7. Finally, because of technological advancements, screen recording feedback is becoming a popular technique. This method can save students time by clearly showing them what to revise and where to focus their attention. This feedback technique is particularly effective for students who have an interest in visual rhetoric and design. Analyzing students' psychology, habits, nature, and interests, writing instructors should select some of such feedback techniques sensibly to cater to their students' genuine needs.

Peer Review as a Scaffolding Feedback Activity

Recent literature reviews on teaching writing have profoundly concentrated on process-based approaches rather than on product-based ones. The latter is believed to be old-fashioned because it takes students' final writing, grammatical accuracy, fluency, format, spelling, and structure into consideration during evaluation (Chen & Zhang, 2022; Palmer et al., 2021). This approach highly regards "what students produced," overlooking "how to produce it" (Wu et al., 2023, p. 2). Product-based feedback may be preferable for some instructors to save their time; however, such an approach may not help instructors accomplish academic goals. On the other hand, process-based feedback keeps instructors updated on how students' writing is improving at each round of revisions. From the student's perspective, product-based evaluation is dreadful and heightens students' anxiety about their grades. Students cannot predict what grade or percentage they will earn at the end of the semester/year. Chen (2019) claims that previous studies have demonstrated that one of the loopholes of product-based evaluation is that instructors tend to overlook students' individual flair for writing, which has the potential to trigger negative reactions in students (Yu et al., 2021). Contrarily, the process-based approach views students as the center of the academic goal and encourages them to be the sole author of their writing. Such a tendency allows them to create a line graph to see the status of their writing quality. Different writing classes around the globe are practicing this approach. This process-oriented learning helps instructors to develop a peer-supported, conducive atmosphere, stressing learners' values in academic assignments (Li & Hebert, 2023; Li, 2023; Zhu & Carless, 2018). As an instructor, I have noticed and experienced that peer review is an integral part of process-based learning. On the psychological level, students develop mutual respect and admire each other's contribution during their peer review exercises.

Peer feedback, which is also gaining popularity in Nepal, is a widely used peer-supported positive learning strategy in writing classes in most parts of the world. "Peer correction can be considered to be an essential component of writing sessions because good writing does not happen overnight" (Sherma, 2020, p. 2013). Peer review or feedback includes students in a collaborative activity where they provide feedback on each other's work, both orally and in written forms (Baker, 2016; Li & Zhang, 2021; Li, 2022; Noroozi et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). The ultimate goal of this activity is to help students realize the

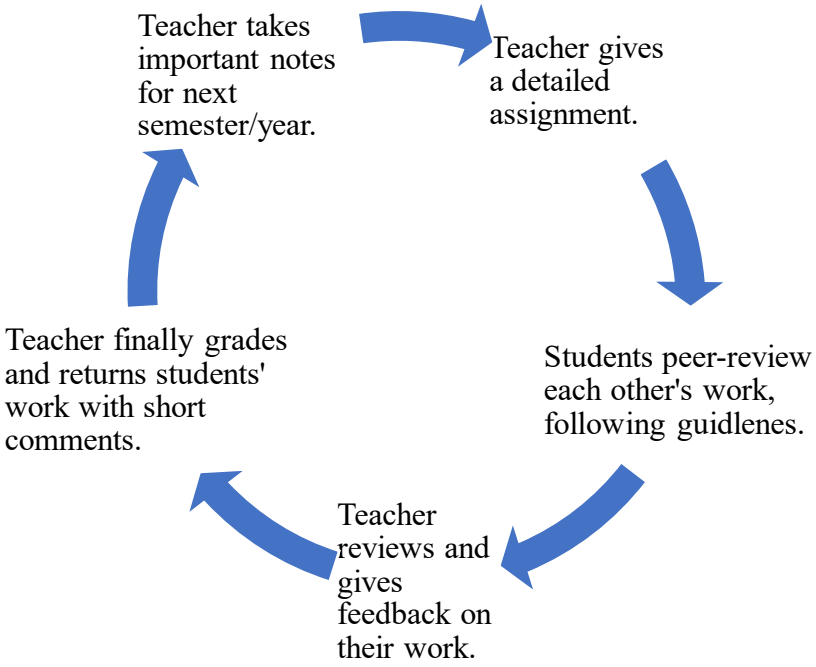
limitations of their work and provide suggestions to each other for improvement (Boud & Dawson, 2021; Carless & Boud, 2018). In contrast to written corrective feedback from instructors/teachers, peer review allows learners to receive quick responses and often more detailed and informative suggestions for improving their writing (Topping, 2009). Also, feedback activities let students share comments in a language they understand better than their teachers'. This merit of peer feedback can lessen the psychological impact of teachers' feedback on students.

Other scholars such as Ferris and Hedgecock (2005) linked peer review with student learning in a safer environment. They opined that a sense of accountability emanates from the exercise of peer review. When students make their best efforts to give feedback on a peer's assignment, they automatically improve their writing, too. Peer review is less formal, allowing students to unpack numerous underlying ideas from informal discussions in class or outside of it. Moreover, when students read each other's written comments or speak to each other, they may easily decode the language they use during verbal communication or email exchanges. In contrast, the language used in instructors' feedback may be difficult for some students to understand. Failure to decode instructors' feedback results in frustration among students. Instructors' ambiguous and complex or negative feedback can make students experience mental turbulence, resulting in poor writing.

Most English language teachers are likely to give their students one opportunity before they make their final submissions. Very few teachers/instructors may manage their time to give their students two revision opportunities. The approaches listed in Figure 2 are considered effective for peer review in writing classes. First, the teacher writes a detailed assignment in bullet points, answering what the assignment is, where to submit it, how to submit it, by when to submit it, etc. Next, the teacher pairs students (average + good) and sends a rubric to follow certain guidelines. After that, students revise their assignments based on peer feedback and turn in their revised assignments for the instructor's feedback. Then, the instructor reviews students' revised drafts and gives them feedback. Upon receiving students' final drafts, the instructor grades and returns students' assignments/drafts with short comments if required. Finally, the instructor notes down important lessons learned from it or some weaknesses discovered during the conduct of this activity. This practice is helpful. Based on the notes taken, instructors can revise the task to avoid repeating past mistakes. This process keeps cycling.

Figure 2

Peer Review Cycle



When this article advocates for the merits of peer review in composition classes, Ahmed (2021) brings up scholars such as Kaufman and Schunn, Rollinson, and Zhu and Cheng, who reported the drawbacks of peer review in their articles. These scholars expressed concern about the concept of mutual trust. They argue that some students do not consider their peers' comments because they are not convinced that they possess the qualities to offer constructive and professional feedback. Some students would rather find peer review time-consuming and mundane. Reading the same text repeatedly and writing and discussing the same thing force most students to develop a negative outlook on the exercise of peer review. Instructors' inadequate monitoring of how students exchanged their feedback adds to the woes of the situation.

Another significant realm of peer review problems is miscommunication resulting from differing cultural values. In rhetoric and composition classes in the U.S., we may find considerable heterogeneity. It might foster negativity among students. As composition classes constitute two groups of students mostly—L1 (native speakers of English) and L2 (non-native speakers of English)—instructors are required to be proactive and smart to adjust their teaching methods to meet students' expectations. Cheng (2013) claimed that discomfort was experienced by students when L1 and L2 students were paired up for peer review because L1 students were more dominant during their peer discussions in class. Despite some demerits of peer review, it is an idea feedback practice from a psychological standpoint in L2 settings. We find student populations with various proficiency levels of English. Instructors themselves can take some initiatives, such as providing self-explanatory guidelines, sharing structured templates, giving multimodal feedback, pairing students based on their needs and abilities, providing language support, and making them feel like they are working in a safer environment. To address the potential issue of distrust between two peers, instructors can conduct one-on-one conferences or workshops aimed at boosting each student's confidence in reviewing another peer's draft and providing strong justifications supported by evidence and

arguments. Peer review allows students to fix or improve their fundamental weaknesses and turn in better versions of assignments with pride. When instructors have little to comment on, students' anxiety lowers, contributing to better mental well-being. Peer review should be adopted as a precursor to instructor's feedback to empower students psychologically.

Method

This study was guided by seven interview questions—four structured and three unstructured. The questions were: 1. How often do you have difficulty decoding your teachers' feedback? 2. Has your teachers' feedback ever offended you and affected your mental well-being? 3. Why were you offended emotionally by your teachers' feedback? 4. How do you want to receive feedback on your writing from your English teacher? 5. How often does your English teacher give you an opportunity to review each other's writing? 6. What should an English teacher do to help a student like you improve writing? 7. In your opinion, why do some students produce poor-quality writing at the undergraduate level? Of the 63 student participants who were undergraduates, female students constituted 39.68% and male students constituted 60.32% of the total participants. The researcher sent Google Forms, including a consent form, to each participant via email. The respondents were all over 18 years old, pursuing their undergraduate studies at various colleges, and the researcher is familiar with each of them. All of them were EFL students.

Figure 3

Students' Difficulty Understanding Teachers' Feedback

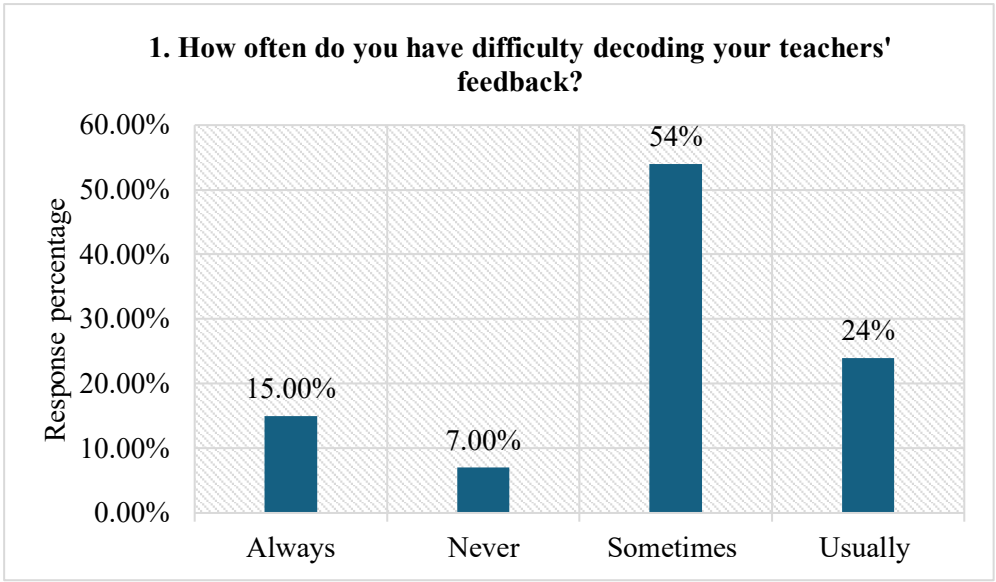
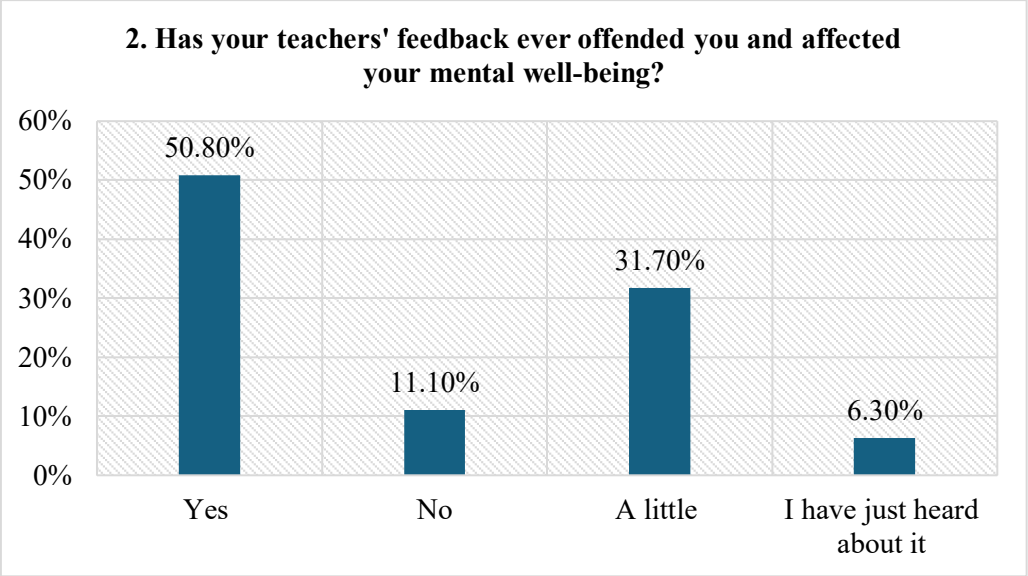


Figure 3 unveils remarkable points about difficulties confronted by students in terms of decoding English teachers' comments. Of the four options of frequency, a large portion of the participants (54%) reported that they occasionally faced difficulty understanding their English teachers' feedback (Bar Chart 1). This trend indicates that some students were compelled to experience emotional turbulence because this challenge lingered for long. Contrarily, 7% of the respondents never confronted this obstacle, suggesting that they were smarter or more familiar with the teachers' style of giving feedback. 15% of the respondents always struggled to comprehend their teachers' feedback, which might have had a negative

effect on their grades. Almost a quarter of the respondents also struggled to decode their teachers' comments, leaving them puzzled and overwhelmed. In a survey conducted by Hill et al. (2021), "Some respondents expressed anger and frustration over what they perceived as cursory marking, unaccompanied by sufficient supporting comments. They interpreted this as a lack of care on the part of their instructors" (p. 311). When students find English teachers' comments inadequate, complex, and negative, students may be frustrated and annoyed. This ultimately threatens their emotional well-being. Detailed comments, accompanied by examples, work more effectively.

Figure 4

Teachers' Feedback and its Effect On Students' Mental Well-being



With respect to the interrelationship between teachers' feedback and students' mental well-being, half of the participants (50.8%) revealed that their instructors' comments have offended their feelings. 31.7% of the participants reported that they had become mentally disturbed to some degree upon receiving their teachers' feedback, and 6.3% had just heard about students being offended owing to their feedback (Bar Chart 2). The data implies that teachers' feedback directly relates to students' psychology. Students' perceptions of feedback can be different from what educators know about the essence of giving it. In addition, 11.1% of them were completely aware of the merit of teachers' feedback regardless of how and what feedback was given. "Although criticism may act as powerful and supportive information, some students might find it difficult to accept" (Rabbani & Husain, 2024, p. 2), even if comments are directed at them implicitly or diplomatically. Humans tend to love and appreciate only positive words but become obsessed with negative words.

Question 3 served as a follow-up to Question 2. The question "Why were you emotionally offended by your teachers' feedback?" elicited a variety of responses. Humans generally love to hear positive things about their work. Some students may have grown up accepting negative feedback as the most effective way to improve their weaknesses. Contrarily, most humans may lower their self-esteem. Student 1 connected negative remarks to sensitivity:

> Negative comments may stop me from working further. I might be obsessed with my teacher's comments and fail to concentrate on other assignments. Such comments also give me a sense of embarrassment.

Student 2 compared feedback with a nightmare:

> When it comes to getting feedback, I do not want to hear more than one weak point. But my teacher gives more than one negative comment.

Student 9 added something more worth considering:

> I often receive 90% negative comments on my assignments. This compels me to think that teachers love writing lengthy negative comments. They devote less time to writing complimentary statements.

Student 24 also shared an impactful experience:

> Sometimes I am convinced that teachers look for our mistakes rather than for good attempts. Errors overshadow good efforts.

Student 46 even despised needs improvement type of feedback.

> Reading criticisms or feedback makes me feel an inferiority complex. There should be no feedback sessions at all, such as in math exams. Teachers should read our assignments and grade them based on their grading rubrics. That's set.

Student 60 was against peer review.

> After peer review, we learn each other's weaknesses. Some peers share such weaknesses with other friends. They do not keep it to themselves. What if your peer reviewer is smarter and more skilled than you and becomes your enemy later? Doesn't he or she embarrass you by circulating the news to others?

Student 62 associated the complex language of feedback with emotional well-being:

> Some teachers' feedback is not easily understood. Sometimes they use abbreviations or acronyms. As a student, I find it difficult to understand what my teachers exactly want me to do. I feel upset.

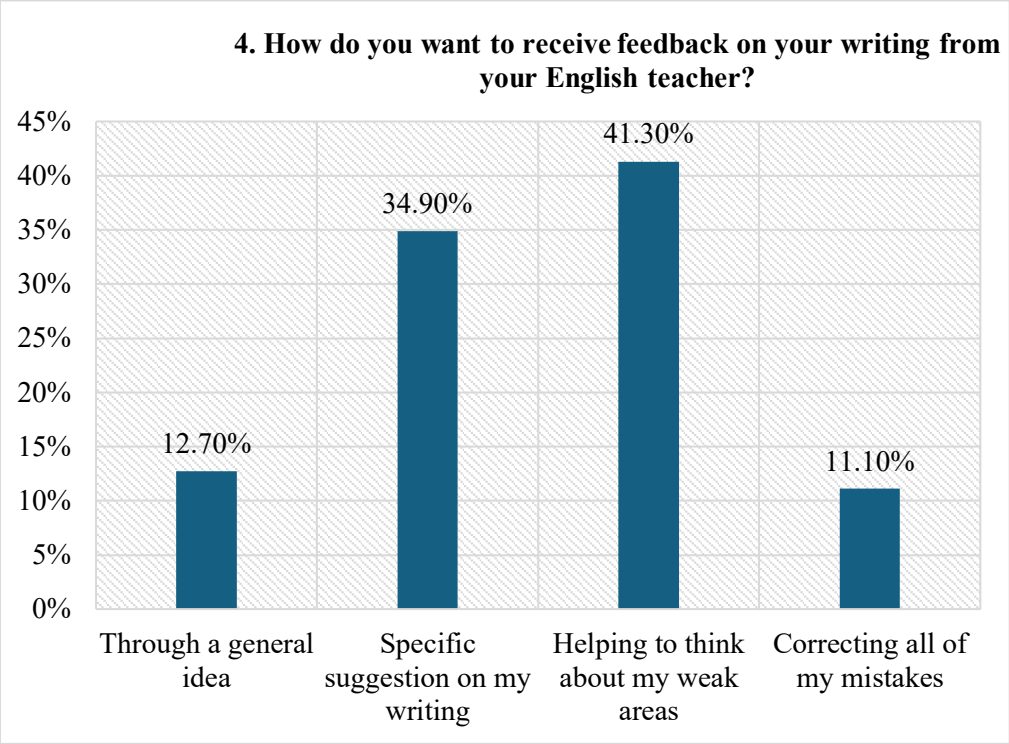
Student 63 also highlighted the connection between comments and emotion:

> Some feedback is not comprehensive enough to understand. Furthermore, instructors do not give examples. I learn better through examples. When I fail to make sense of their feedback, I get headaches.

The concerns raised by the students are valid and prompt scholars to address them. Students have difficulty internalizing the essence of negative emotions. The above excerpts indicate that negative comments are the worst of all types of feedback. Mostly younger students begin to question their worth and feel stigmatized. Their anxiety heightens. Their situation becomes worse if instructors share general feedback only in class. Generalized feedback can feel impersonal and discouraging. Frustrated students cannot achieve their intended goals if they fail to decode their instructors' feedback. Both instructors and students must attempt to discover approaches to discard possible misunderstandings.

Figure 5

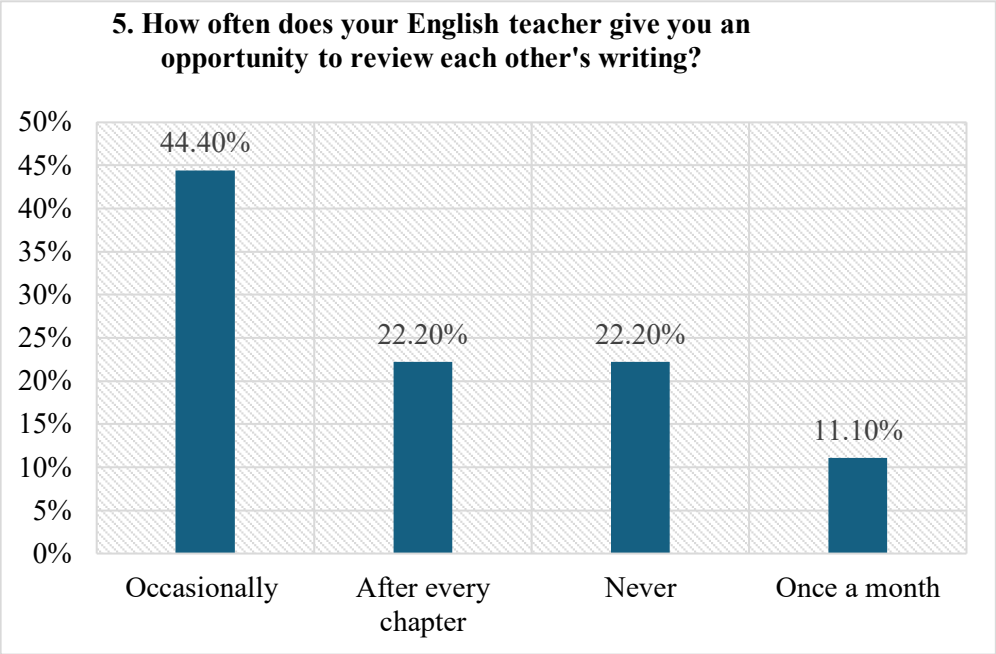
Feedback Expectations From Instructors



The highest percentage (41.3%) of the participants reported a direct connection between feedback and the weak aspects of their writing. This percentage suggests a strong need for constructive feedback that promotes students' self-improvement and critical thinking (Bar Chart 3). Individualized suggestions are demanded by a large portion of the participants (34.9%) because the more specific the comments are, the more time students can save. In contrast, general or global feedback and corrective comments stand as the least valuable feedback choices reported by almost the same number (12.7% and 11.1%, respectively). These data suggest that students enhance their writing skills when they participate in writing processes and receive more specific feedback, and there is a strong desire for a process-oriented principle.

Figure 6

Frequency Of Peer Review



The data above indicate a lack of regular and consistent peer review in the classroom (Bar Chart 4). Students were informed that they were not exposed to such peer review exercises on a regular basis. Only 22.2% of them reported experiencing peer review regularly—after every chapter. The same percentage of students stated that they never got the opportunity to peer review their classmates' assignments. Only 11.1% of the participants said that they did peer review monthly. Overall, it can be concluded that peer review has not been a regular classroom practice, indicating that instructors have yet to realize its benefits.

Concerning interview question no. 6, "What should an English teacher do to help a student like you improve writing?," most answers are inclined to personalized feedback or specific suggestions on their weak areas of writing. Student 1 responded:

> To help students like me improve our writing, an English teacher should take time to discuss our weaknesses. They should also give questionnaires as homework for students to learn how to write. I believe taking baby steps will be better than diving right into writing. One at a time, reviewing the works will help to ensure their works are ready to be presented.

Likewise, Student 2 stated:

> English teachers can improve students' writing skills through clear instructions, modeling, individualized feedback, peer review, workshops, grammar instruction, reading, conferences, use of technology, supportive environment, and professional development.

Student 3 shared, "An English teacher can support a student's writing by providing constructive feedback on grammar, structure, and style."

Numerous students believe that their writing improves if instructors pinpoint their mistakes and provide clear instructions on how they can revise them better when their instructors provide ample examples and model effective writing techniques. Even if writing is different from speaking, students enjoy interactive sessions in their writing classes. As instructors, they must ensure that they assign manageable tasks to their students so that they will engage in the given tasks with enthusiasm. Merely assigning tasks does not help students if students fail to respond to the assignments. In writing classes, explicit instruction, customizable templates, and structured guidance are useful in breaking down bigger tasks into smaller and manageable ones. Using technology in class, organizing class conferences, and publishing mini-class journals with appreciation are some of the ways to keep students' writing spirit high. Overall, specific feedback, apparent examples, consistent practice, and an interactive environment are some desirable classroom activities for students. Since each class is diverse, only a wide range of strategies can cater to the diverse needs of students.

In response to the final question (Q. No. 7), "In your opinion, why do some students produce poor-quality writing at the undergraduate level?," the most noticeable reasons recorded were a lack of practice, weak foundational skills, and inadequate teacher guidance. Several students are unprepared for college-level writing on account of insufficient emphasis on writing skills in prior education. The transition to higher standards, especially abroad, is challenging due to different expectations for clarity, structure, and citations. Students also suffer from a lack of personalized feedback and constructive criticism. Student 1 remarked:

> Not enough practice, no feedback, and no encouragement. At the bachelor [undergraduate] level, most teachers don't care about individual grades, while students only focus on passing. The only feedback I received on my 3000-word research paper wasn't deep enough.

Student 5 said:

> They might be unaware of their capabilities and weaknesses their teachers are unable to address. Some teachers give personalized feedback, which is helpful. Some teachers give general feedback, which fails to meet students' expectations. And students cannot still figure out what is wrong with their assignments.

Student 20 stated:

> Students have the tendency to think deeply about teachers' negative or needs improvement type of feedback. Instead of working on their weak areas, they mentally traumatize themselves.

Student 31, too, emphasized students' mental stability:

> Despite being good at writing, schools and instructors do not know what is going through students' minds. Instructors' feedback addresses students' linguistic issues but not family and mental suffering.

Student 41 saw peer review as an idea option for effective feedback:

> If peer review is done in class regularly, students can open up and may learn better because they understand each other's messages more easily. Peer review can improve their bonding and communication skills, providing them with opportunities to do more than one round of revision at each other's request. Students are reluctant to make such requests to teachers and teachers may not consider, as they have their schedule to follow.

Student 57 focused on a process of encoding and decoding teachers' comments:

> The most important gap is teachers encode their feedback based on their assumptions, but students, on the other hand, fail to decode the feedback. Most of the time, students do not get an opportunity to ask for clarification. They revise their assignments based on their guesswork. I have never gotten two chances to revise my work and turn in.

And student 60 expressed concern about surface-level errors:

> Some of English teachers meticulously check spelling, grammar, and syntax. Big ideas of students are overlooked. Then, students start devoting their time to fixing such errors and produce clean work but not quality work. Also, some ESL learners often take more time to pick big words, phrasal verbs, etc.

It can be argued that poor-quality writing is directly linked with a lack of specific feedback, students' mental well-being, and the process of decoding teachers' messages. Giving general feedback or just praising students may not necessarily elevate the quality of students' writing. Rote learning, fixed writing rules, and rigid educational practices further restrict creativity and exploration in writing. Additional issues include distractions resulting from social media, focus on other subjects, language barriers, and a lack of an English-speaking environment. There is a growing trend of using AI tools that do not understand the exact contexts of assignments and generate one-size-fits-all answers.

Findings and Analysis

There is no debate over how important feedback is in teaching writing. Even though feedback is aimed at improving students' academic performance, all types of feedback may not work for everyone. In the survey, most students were ready to welcome the feedback that would help them think creatively and explore possibilities and the feedback that would specifically relate to their weak areas. Some teachers prefer giving global feedback to personalized feedback. Global feedback may rather leave students in a state of complete perplexity. Teachers have become less concerned about how their feedback can affect students' mental well-being. Teachers have prioritized improvement in students' linguistic arenas. Teachers are working hard to elevate students' writing through content materials. However, how teachers' words or comments have misfired has gone unnoticed. Students' perception of teachers' comments relies on different variables such as age, gender, religion, caste, family background, and economic status. These variables weaken students' mental readiness for feedback. Moreover, the situation becomes worse when students fail to decode their teachers' comments and messages.

Despite receiving feedback, students may go in the wrong direction, resulting in frustration and annoyance. Most students have responded to the open-ended question that they have experienced mental turbulence and anxiety owing to complex or ambiguous feedback from their teachers. It has also been found that students and teachers have not discovered ways to sit for a second round of revision. The survey hints that there is a strong necessity for a second round of revision to yield quality writing. So, the process of encoding and decoding feedback has massive implications in the teaching of writing in EFL and ESL settings. Peer review is the safest and the most convenient way to explore weak areas of writing for students. Students offer feedback in students' language, meaning peers can understand each other better. Teachers may not always put themselves in learners' shoes. In addition, students are likely to take teachers' feedback more personally than that of a peer. This mentality can have massive impacts on learners' mental well-being and lead to disastrous writing quality. The data have clearly indicated that feedback must be

individualized, keeping its probable psychological effects in mind. Different students have different perceptions. Teachers cannot just assume that their comments are well received and well understood by learners. And peer review is less threatening to students. Peer review can address most feedback gaps and mitigate the extent of mental impact feedback can have on students.

Discussion

Feedback practice is analogous to one person's meat is another person's poison. Some learners demand feedback on their work so that they can always achieve excellent results. On the other hand, some learners dread reading feedback because feedback can cause mental distress and contradict learners' beliefs. Some students assume that they are good writers, and they may be making a significant effort. Unfortunately, the moment they receive a teacher's comment that contradicts their assumption, their morale is lowered. Consequently, they become hopeless, disturbed, and anxious. Therefore, providing feedback is a sensitive business in academics. Teachers' challenging job is to correct students, keeping their dignity, self-esteem, mentality, and psychology intact.

The survey outcomes themselves reveal that a maximum number of students expect their teachers to give them feedback on specific areas of grammar such as tense, concord, topic sentence, conjunction, grammar, active voice, passive voice, word selection, and many more areas of writing such as coherence, introduction, Similarly, another plethora of students want their teachers to help them think about their weak areas rather than pinpoint them. Such deliveries of feedback demand a tremendous amount of effort from teachers in comparison to other types of feedback. Giving general feedback and editing each error are traditional and teacher-centered in nature. It rather leaves students confused inasmuch as general feedback does not represent students' specific weaknesses, and students do not figure out where to start. Only specific or personalized feedback can direct students to the right path.

Peer review is another effective way of giving feedback on students' drafts. This can be understood as a pre-stage of feedback because students happen to communicate with each other and rectify any type of error before submitting their essays/drafts to their teachers. Next, peer review allows students to turn in a better version of their first draft. On the teacher's end, teachers receive a better version of writing for assessments. Moreover, it can be a scaffolding feedback activity before students achieve proficiency in writing. Some students never receive an opportunity to explore their weaknesses or improve their weaknesses. To fail students in any examinations based on their writing products without giving them a single chance to rectify the errors they made intentionally or unintentionally is unfair. It is understandable that some teachers have different contexts. They teach big classes. Consequently, time management can be seen as a hindrance to effective teaching writing and feedback sessions. Peer review comes as a big relief to them. This practice helps share a teacher's responsibility. This activity also promotes learner autonomy and makes them more responsible and more proactive than before. Winstone and Boud (2019) and Yu and Liu (2021) assure that peer review or feedback sessions encourage students to engage in a collaborative learning process, enhancing their socialization skills and critical thinking skills. These skills also uplift learners' mental strength and give a positive vibe.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research is based on the survey participation of Nepali undergraduate students, which may limit the general applicability of the findings. There is a strong need for extensive study on how instructors should give feedback, ensuring that students' mental or emotional health remains intact. It is unfair to assume that teachers' feedback is always welcomed by

students and they align with it because every student may not have the courage to accept criticism or their weaknesses. The other point to make is that this study does not include instructors' perceptions of how they have adopted the feedback strategies in their writing classes/courses. Future research could be undertaken to gain more insights into the gap between teachers' perceptions of feedback and students' perceptions of feedback and recommend more pragmatic solutions to writing issues that students have been grappling with.

Conclusion

Having provided insight into students' preferences for feedback on specific weak areas in the undergraduate context, this article intends to underscore that mere feedback does not motivate students to rework their weak writings. There is also an equal possibility that feedback can be perceived as embarrassing, deterring, or demotivating, affecting their mental health. Hence, the selection of appropriate feedback types or the understanding of students' psychology regarding feedback that is being offered to them must be a top priority. Yorke's (2003) argument makes a lot of sense here. Besides giving feedback, an English writing teacher must treat their students psychologically during a feedback session. For example, one regards personalized feedback as very suitable and to the point, whereas the other takes it personally. As instructors, we may come across some sensitive students who do not initially perceive feedback as a precursor to their finest writing products. Some students are likely to be embarrassed or have an inferiority complex about their writing abilities. Furthermore, such students tend to feel stigmatized about writing and label themselves as a "weak or unaccomplished" student writer.

The idea of connecting students' mental health with instructors' comments has become an important issue recently. Finding the intersectionality between feedback types, survey findings, and instructors' judgment is crucial. Unlike in past years, students' understanding of feedback from teachers has become something scholars are looking into. Understanding students' expectations in terms of mental well-being can narrow the divide between feedback and its psychological consequences, and teachers and students can achieve their common goals in a writing course.

Abbreviations

NS = Native Speaker

ESL = English as a Second Language

EFL = English as a Foreign Language

L1 = Native language

L2 = Non-native language

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